

Interview

## Interview with Barbara Holland

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**Guest Editor:** Sabine O'Hara, Ph.D. **Assistant Guest Editors:** Camille Range, Ph.D., William Terrell Danley, and Andre de Souza Coelho **Editor:** Patrick M. Green, Ed.D.

### Introduction

The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) was founded in 1989 by a group of university presidents and chancellors united by the challenges and opportunities facing urban campuses. Over the years, the organization has become a membership for the entire campus with programming for people from across institutional roles and functions.

*Metropolitan Universities* journal (MUJ) has been CUMU's online journal since 1990—soon after the founding of CUMU when its inaugural issue was released—and has long served as a meeting ground for the people, ideas, and research that move our field forward.

In this interview, current CUMU Executive Director and past MUJ journal editor Valerie Holton interviews Barbara Holland who served as editor of the journal from 1997-2016. Dr. Holland is a professor, researcher and consultant recognized internationally for her scholarship and expertise on organizational change in higher education with a special focus on the strategic impacts of community engagement as a method of teaching, learning and research. She has served in senior academic administrative roles at several universities in the United States and Australia, held a visiting scholar role in the US Department of Housing and Urban Development headquarters for two years during the Clinton and Bush administrations, and was Executive Director of the federally funded National Service-Learning Clearinghouse for seven years. The library collection, upon the closing of the Clearinghouse, was moved to the Criss Library at University of Nebraska Omaha in 2011 and is called The Barbara A. Holland Collection for Service-Learning and Community Engagement. In 2018, CUMU launched the Barbara A. Holland Scholar-Administrator Award in recognition of her contributions to the field and her legacy as a scholar-administrator. In this interview, Dr. Holland discusses her work with CUMU and MUJ since she became part of the organization in 1990.

## Interview

**Valerie Holton:** My first question for you is one that I already know that you love talking about, and I love hearing you talk about: What do you love about CUMU?

**Barbara Holland:** CUMU is very different from other associations because it has always had a culture of caring and sharing.

**Valerie Holton:** I absolutely agree and love the phrase culture of care. I'm curious, what were those initial CUMU conversations like? What was it like in that first CUMU meeting that you were involved in?

**Barbara Holland:** The first meeting was at a president's residence in Ohio at Wright State University. And I think there were about five presidents there, and they decided that they wanted to really make CUMU happen. I was not there for that meeting. That's the only one I missed. They wanted to recognize that the nation was getting more concentrated in cities and that the urban institutions are going to have to prepare for the growth that was going to be in big cities. And we just happened to be part of those big cities. The second meeting was in Arkansas at Little Rock, and I was there for that one and all the ones after. We worked for a couple of days and put together an idea of what CUMU would be and what we expected to do and how we were going to make our first call to invite people. It was based on the fact that the nation in 1989 was congregating into cities. It's where the people go to work as well as to study. And they want to do both at the same time. Our people recognize that our students are working and studying, and they're trying to get ahead and trying to have a better life.

**Valerie Holton:** That's so true. What do you think has changed about CUMU over the years?

**Barbara Holland:** It has always kept the culture of care. What is really interesting is that it started as a presidential conference, but it included the people who worked all around the institution. As urban institutions, we have similar themes and issues, and the conference was a place where people who worked in related areas across their universities could come with the presidents and mingle. And the presidents participated, you know, they would go into breakout sessions. The only thing presidents ever did without the rest of the audience was a dinner at every conference. They had one night where they all got on a bus and went and had a dinner on their own. The conferences also led to other things that really engaged the whole story of being a city-organized and city-aware university.

**Valerie Holton:** You were the editor of the journal for so many years. What was one of your favorite memories of being editor?

**Barbara Holland:** The first editor, Ernest Lynton was a friend as well as editor, and he passed it off to me. He was a wonderful friend; it was a pleasure to be around him. He was funny and clever and was really good at editing the journal.

**Valerie Holton:** Didn't you get your start in journalism? How did you first get interested in community engagement? As long as I've known you, you've been well-known and well-respected for your contributions and your leadership in this space.

**Barbara Holland:** I don't know. I did start my career as a journalist at age of six when I decided to do a weekly newspaper about my sister.

**Valerie Holton:** I love this.

**Barbara Holland:** And I was absolutely sure that I wanted to be a journalist. And we lived in a little town that had about population of about 800. My dad put himself through college as a janitor. He appreciated his college degree that he got by the sweat of his own hands, and he wanted other people to have it too. Ultimately, he got a job as vice dean of extension at the university. And he loved it. It just gave him great joy. So, I think my interest started with that little hometown with a wonderful newspaper. And I was always interested in it. I made up news stories, mostly about my cat. I made little news strips and put them on my sister's door. So, I was absolutely sure that I wanted to go to journalism school, and it was never a question. And fortunately, I was in a state that has the first, the largest and the only institution running a newspaper for the city that they are in. It is not a campus newspaper. It is the city newspaper of Columbia, Missouri. And that was very helpful. I got my bachelor's and master's there, moved west, and after that I spent the rest of my career as the media person for universities, the University of Colorado and others. And that was fun. And my last job was running the news for Portland State University. When we got a new president and we all went into the auditorium to welcome and hear the first speech of the new president and at the end of it, I said, I want to work for her! That was Judith Ramaly. I got to work with other universities and some of the organizations like CUMU to help organize the federally funded opportunities to have more students have the opportunity to learn. There were probably three or four different programs over time that the government supported, but they were focused on ways to have universities put their kids out into the neighborhoods to do things that were useful and progressive, not just patting people on the head and saying, "We're sorry you're poor." It was meant to help young people develop a desire to make sure that we all work for equity.

**Valerie Holton:** And then is that when you started to develop this idea of being an administrator-scholar?

**Barbara Holland:** Well, I can't take any claim of being the one who came up with that term. It first started bouncing around when we felt that we wanted to have a meaningful expression and acknowledgment of faculty doing things in the community. Because some of our institutions were still telling young faculty: You can't do all this stuff you're doing out in the community. You have to get this done. You have to write your book. You have to do something that I had to do. You don't get to skip that step.

We've been trying to address that for 20 years, but CUMU was the association very attentive to the meaningful recognition of faculty who do engagement. And it's pretty much in every institution in the country now. I know it's a continuing everlasting challenge for younger scholars who may be feeling a little uncertain or wondering if they're going to be recognized for what they're doing. But I think most institutions have accepted engagement with some legitimacy.

**Valerie Holton:** You know, one thing I didn't ask earlier, but I wanted to say is that you taught me the phrase “to what end?” And I think that has been really helpful to the field around how do we think about assessment. And so I am curious, how did you get involved in the assessment conversation? Because you really led a lot of that work.

**Barbara Holland:** Well, when we had federal support, we had to report. Where there wasn't federal support or state support, some people kept that idea that they should be measuring what the impact is. And generally, that work ends up—as it should—in the journal.